

When the lights go on again all over the world . . .

Those words begin the lyrics of a song made popular by Vera Lynn, a British vocalist, in 1942. They and their melody always stir up an emotion in me, a kind of repressed sob. I was only 14 years old back then and it was the bleakest year of World War II. Britain was still staggered by defeats in Europe, Africa and Asia, the United States had only begun to recover from surprise attack, Russia had been pushed back a thousand miles into its own hinterland. Thoughts of recovery ranged far into the future. And then we listened to Vera Lynn's poetry of hope:

When the lights go on again all over the world / And the boys are home again all over the world / And rain or snow is all that may fall from the skies above / A kiss won't mean "goodbye" but "Hello to love"

Nor did it take a second World War to raise that plaintive melody. Many a poet sensed there was something already wrong with our world. Whereas people once believed at least by habit in some kind of providence guiding human history, by the 20th century in 1919 we hear the Irish poet Yeats saying: *Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold. / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. . . / The ceremony of innocence is drowned; / The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity . . . / Surely some revelation is at hand.*

And we also heard that other Irish genius James Joyce in his novel *Ulysses* asking, pleading before the ghost of his mother: *Tell me the word, mother. . . The word known to all men.* The word is love – as is made clear by that other character in Joyce's novel, Leopold Bloom, in a futile pub argument with a rabid nationalist: *But it's no use, says [Bloom]. Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life. // What? says Alf. // Love, says Bloom. I mean the opposite of hatred.*

Bloom is of Jewish ancestry and so the rabid nationalist (who is only described as "the citizen", no name) mocks Bloom's Gospel of Love: *A new apostle to the gentiles . . . Universal love;* and then in a cynically sing-song way chants: *Love loves to love love. Nurse loves the new chemist. Constable 14A loves Mary Kelly . . . And this person loves that other person . . . but God loves everybody.*

And yet as Richard Ellmann has said in an article "The Big Word in Ulysses": *Affection between human beings, however transitory, however qualified, is the closest we can come to paradise.* All of which simply supports our second reading from St. Paul today: *Brothers and sisters: Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, . . . All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ. So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us.*

*When the lights go on again all over the world / And the ships will sail again all over the world / Then we'll have time for things like wedding rings and free hearts will sing /
When the lights go on again all over the world.*